



Washington State Transition to Kindergarten and Kindergarten → Quick Guide

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This Quick Guide serves as an accessible summary of Washington state's comprehensive guidance for Transition to Kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten. It is designed to provide educators, administrators, and families with a concise overview of essential practices, expectations, and supports for a successful TK and kindergarten experience. This streamlined resource highlights key components of each chapter of the complete Washington State Transition to Kindergarten and Kindergarten Guide.



CHAPTER

1

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP) IN TK/KINDERGARTEN



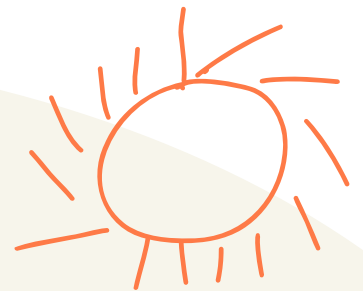
DAP is a method used in early childhood education that focuses on learning through play and strength-based approaches. It combines knowledge of child development, evidence-based practices, and considers the importance of culture and family.

- DAP ensures educators understand best practices, respecting each child's unique background. It encourages play-based, engaging learning environments.
- The three core considerations of DAP are knowing about:
 - o child development and how this understanding applies in multiple contexts,
 - o knowing what is individually appropriate, and
 - o knowing what is contextually meaningful.
- The principles of DAP include:
 - o recognizing the dynamic processes of development,
 - o the importance of all domains of child development,
 - o the role of play in learning,
 - o and the need to consider cultural contexts and individual differences.



Resources

- [NAEYC DAP Position Statement](#) for core considerations, guidelines, and implementation recommendations
- [A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades \(Pre-K–3rd Grade\)](#)
- [NAEYC's Principles of Child Development and Learning and Implications that Inform Practice](#)
- [Promoting Purposeful Play](#)
- [The Power of Playful Learning in the Early Childhood Setting](#)





DAP and Equity are Interconnected

DAP puts equity in the forefront, ensuring that each student receives what they need to reach their full academic and social potential. This involves addressing barriers that historically marginalized groups have encountered in pursuing education.

Before creating an inclusive, equitable learning environment, teachers and administrators need to develop a deep understanding of their culture, beliefs, values, and biases. It is essential to recognize the advantages of diversity and refrain from generalizing or relying on stereotypes in both our personal and professional lives.

In pursuit of equity in schools, the National Equity Project outlines the following three actions:

1. Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor.
2. Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children.
3. Discovering and cultivating every human's unique gifts, talents, and interests.



Resources

- [National Equity Project](#)
- [Pyramid Model Equity Coaching Guide](#)
- [Five Equity Practices for Principals](#)
- [School Leaders as Equity Leaders](#)
- [OSPI Equity and Civil Rights Resources](#)



DAP and Child Development

Children in kindergarten and TK, aged 4–7, undergo significant growth and development. This critical period sees diverse progress among children in the same classroom, as each brings unique experiences to their learning environment.

Research shows that integrated, play-based learning encourages exploration, problem-solving, and imagination, while also fostering

cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills. Play helps children familiarize themselves with school routines and tools, offering a true reflection of their abilities and supporting their overall development. Administrators must ensure classrooms have adequate play materials and adequate time for play must be incorporated into daily schedules.



Kindergarten and TK teachers must have a strong grasp of child development principles. Collaboration between teachers and leaders through professional learning opportunities and discussions helps deepen this understanding. It is imperative that ALL educators receive support and professional development on DAP for early learners including:

- New teachers and paraeducators,
- Teachers and paraeducators new to teaching TK/kindergarten (moved from a different grade level), and
- Specialists

Include educators in the process of reviewing and adopting a developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, comprehensive curriculum. Look for a curriculum that promotes integrated, hands-on learning, small group, and play-based experiences that minimizes whole-group instruction.



Resources

- [Washington State Early Learning and Developmental Guidelines](#)
- [DCYF's Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals](#)
- [OSPI Social Emotional Learning \(P–3rd\) Benchmarks](#)
- [Washington SEL Resources](#)
- [Social Emotional Learning Pathways](#)
- [Trauma-Informed SEL Resources](#)
- [National Center for Pyramid Model](#)
- [K–2 Foundational Skills](#)
- [Early Literacy Pathways \(P–3rd\)](#)
- [Learning Pathways in Numeracy \(P–3rd\)](#)
- [Early Childhood Science Education Position Statement](#)
- [Early Childhood Since Time Immemorial: Early Learning Curriculum](#)
- [Environmental Education: Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence | eePRO](#)
- [The Benefits of Interdisciplinary Learning in Early Childhood](#)
- [The Case for Interdisciplinary Learning in Your Child's Education](#)
- [Interdisciplinary Connections in Pre-K Curriculum and Instruction](#)
- [Institute of Education Science What Works Clearinghouse](#)



CHAPTER 2

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

PART ONE: CLASSROOM COMMUNITY & CHILD GUIDANCE



An appropriate and high-quality learning environment is crucial for facilitating children's learning and ensuring their safety and well-being. It allows children to express their knowledge, curiosity, and challenges.



Classroom Community

Building a warm and welcoming classroom community enhances relationships, self-discipline, and responsibility among students and teachers. Strategies include modeling respectful communication and teaching empathy.

A well-designed classroom environment supports children's learning, safety, and well-being. It should be developmentally appropriate, culturally representative, and promote creativity. The following strategies are for teachers to implement to support elements of a caring community:

- **Developing Relationships**
- **Student Autonomy**
- **Self-Motivation**
- **Social Emotional Learning**
 - o Friendship Skills
 - o Emotional Literacy
 - o Emotional Regulation
 - o Problem Solving





Child Guidance

Effective child guidance involves setting clear behavior expectations, using logical consequences, and de-escalating situations promptly. Teachers should focus on engagement-based classroom management.

School policies for TK and kindergarten should follow DAP for handling disruptions and avoiding expulsion of students. Teachers should receive training on child guidance and school policies. For help with establishing these policies, see [Discipline, Suspension, and Expulsion](#), from the Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds.



Resources

- [Cultivating Intrinsic Motivation and Creativity in the Classroom](#)
- [5 Incredibly Fun Games to Teach Self-Regulation](#)
- [OSPI's Social Emotional Learning Pathways and Social Emotional Learning Implementation Guide](#)
- ["We Can Be Problem Solvers"](#)
- [Center for Inspired Teaching's White Paper](#)
- [Hot Buttons Activity](#)

PART TWO: PHYSICAL SPACE

The importance of the learning environment cannot be overstated. A well-designed space engages and inspires learners while supporting various educational experiences. From fostering social interactions to providing comfort and routine, the environment sets the stage for effective learning.



Classroom Layout

Classroom layout should promote purposeful play-based activities and meet students' developmental needs, with clear boundaries and thoughtful organization.

Schools should prioritize purchasing child-sized, modular furniture that can be configured in different ways according to

learning needs and creative play. Consider neutral wall colors, and ways to let in natural light and fresh air. Make sure TK students have playground equipment that is suitable for 4 year olds, as many play structures are designed for 5 and older.





Centers

Centers, such as literacy, math, science, and dramatic play areas (with a variety of themes), provide hands-on learning experiences and foster the development of academic and social skills.

As outlined in [RCW 28A.150.315](#), TK and kindergarten are designed to support and develop the whole child. When appropriately implemented, interest areas/centers provide space to promote development and learning through play. Area rugs of various sizes for each TK and kindergarten classroom can be used to define space for centers and activities and absorb sound.



Classroom Decor and Wall Space

Visuals, wall space, and decor should be meaningful, at children's eye level, and not overwhelming, creating a calm and focused learning atmosphere.



Materials

Materials should be diverse, including both open-ended and close-ended items, to inspire creativity and support various developmental skills.

Teachers need dedicated storage for dramatic play materials and manipulatives, ensuring a variety of experiences beyond a home kitchen. These resources can be shared among staff. Also ensure there is ample space to store artistic creations (drying racks are essential).



Outdoor Play

Outdoor play supports physical, social, and mental development, fostering motor skills, creativity, and social interaction while connecting children with nature.



Resources

- [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#)
- [Seven Stages of Block Play](#)
- [Reading Rockets Guide to Literacy-Rich Environments](#)
- [Young Children Benefit from Regular Time Outdoors](#)
- [Nature as a Pathway for Healing from ACES](#)
- [What to Wear: How to dress for nature adventures](#)
- [Incorporating Nature into your Early Childhood Program](#)
- [Outdoor Learning and Social Emotional Learning Connection](#)
- [Considerations for Outdoor Learning](#)



CHAPTER 3

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES



Effective instructional practices in TK and kindergarten are hands-on, play-based, integrated, and adaptable to individual children and specific goals. Teachers should be flexible, using a variety of strategies tailored to the situation and each child's needs to foster meaningful learning experiences.



Teacher Role and Intentional Teaching

A teacher's attitude and disposition toward teaching and learning influences how children experience school. TK and kindergarten teachers need a solid understanding of content and pedagogy to positively influence children's learning in every developmental area. Teachers must interpret and implement the curriculum to serve their students and constantly assess children's progress to inform their teaching. Administrators should be aware that supervision and professional development for staff are instrumental in providing the tools necessary for high-quality teaching practices and enriching early learning experiences.



Learning Experiences

Quality instruction addresses children's social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development and is grounded in DAP. Learning must be child-centered, with topics and activities that are meaningful, appropriate, and relevant to students. Effective early childhood educators emphasize active learning—play, child-selected activities, and small-group learning. Teachers facilitate children's learning through active participation, providing engaging materials, movement, singing, and interactions with peers and adults.

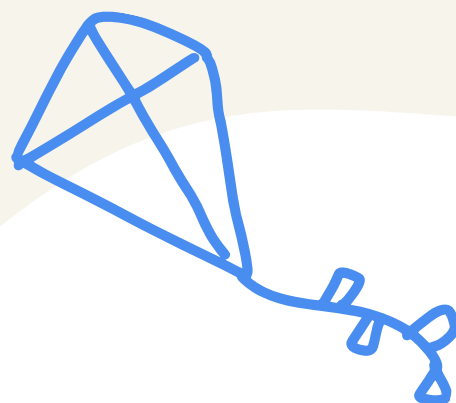


Administrators should encourage and grant time to teachers (including specialists to integrate play into TK and kindergarten curriculum. Please consider recommended whole group time for TK (10–20 minutes) and kindergarten (15–25 minutes) when structuring the master schedules for our youngest learners.



Resources

- [Playful Learning: A Powerful Teaching Tool from NAEYC](#)
- [Station Rotation: Differentiating Instruction to Reach All Students](#)
- [Literacy Centers in Action](#)
- [Intensifying Literacy Instruction: Essential Practices](#)
- [Best Activities for Independent Workstations in Kindergarten and First Grade](#)
- [Printable posters to prompt conversations in different centers](#)
- [Planning Guide to help plan meaningful centers](#)
- [“A Pedagogy of Play” includes a chapter on what administrators, school leaders, and teachers can do to build a schoolwide culture of playful learning](#)
- [Seven Elements Important to Successful Implementation of Early Literacy Intervention Science of Reading for Ages 0–5](#)
- [The Science of Reading in Early Childhood Education: Building Strong Literacy Foundations](#)
- [The Science of Reading in Preschool](#)



CHAPTER 4

CLASSROOM STRUCTURES

The way a program structures time, establishes routines, manages transitions, and interacts with children directly reflects its philosophy. These elements shape the time spent in a classroom and play a crucial role in establishing an engaging learning environment.

Schedules

The classroom schedule plays a role in creating a developmentally appropriate environment. A balanced daily schedule accommodates play-based learning, integrates various content areas, and offers choices to children. This approach maximizes engagement and minimizes challenging behaviors.

To support the needs of TK and kindergarten students, it is considered best practice for administrators to prioritize the creation of TK and kindergarten classroom schedules first. This helps to ensure the unique needs of the youngest learners- such as adequate time for transitions, breaks, and play-based learning- are thoughtfully accommodated. Administrators should consider including 45–60 minutes of child-led exploration time, 20–30 minutes of rest or quiet time, and minimizing transitions. Teachers will need to break up the suggested large chunks of instructional time designated by curriculum publishers. Flexibility must be granted for teachers to grow the whole group instruction time as the year progresses.



Resources

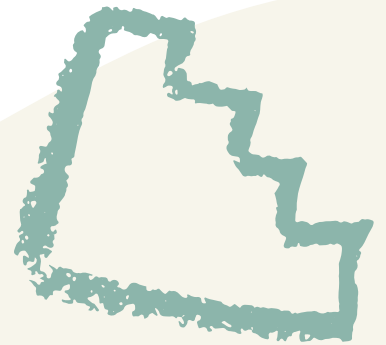
- [Kindergarten and TK Schedule Examples](#)
- [Kindergarten Daily Schedule with Descriptions](#)
- [Sample Schedule from Teaching Strategies](#)





Routines and Transitions

Teaching, modeling, and practicing routines helps children understand the flow of the day, respond to expectations, and build flexibility and independence. Effective transitions play a significant role in maintaining a smooth and efficient daily routine, providing strategies to help children move from one activity to the next while developing independence and self-regulation skills.



Resources

- [The Importance of Schedules and Routines](#)
- [Behavior Expectations and Strategies Poster](#)
- [6 Questions to Tackle in Managing Classroom Procedures](#)
- [Resources from Understood.org](#)



CHAPTER 5

INCLUSIONARY PRACTICES



Inclusion is a civil right as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Inclusion is also a cornerstone of developmentally appropriate practices and should be present in all TK and kindergarten classrooms.



What it looks like in the Classroom

Practitioners must utilize strategies for creating inclusive environments that celebrate individual differences and ensure all children can participate fully. This includes recognizing children's accomplishments, setting up predictable routines, and promoting positive relationships.

All teaching staff must be aware of school and LEA policies for requesting assessments or making referrals for student services. Incorporating this practice into the school's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) will be essential.

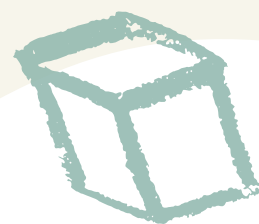
Teaching staff may need significant professional development in implementing the comprehensive process of inclusionary practices. There may be a need for additional materials and/or personnel to support inclusion. Please consider how special education personnel can be used to support general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. The use of purposeful play, reasonable direct instructional blocks of 10–15 minutes, and adequate classroom support will only enhance inclusion practices. When creating schedules, make a common time for teaming between general and special education teachers.





Resources

- [Child Find \(includes Pre-K\) policies and procedures on OSPI's website](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(ECTA\)](#)
- [NCPMI Positive Feedback and Encouragement](#)
- [Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#)
- [Head Start's Inclusion Lab Website](#)
- [UW Haring Center's tip sheet on inclusion resources](#)
- [Washington State MTSS Framework](#)
- [Washington's Integrated Student Supports Protocol](#)



Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is an essential element in inclusive classrooms, it values the strengths of all students, raising academic expectations and endorsing multiculturalism as an asset. CRT involves using materials and strategies that reflect and respect all students' backgrounds, addressing biases, and promoting equity.



Resources

- [What is Culturally Responsive Teaching?](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters](#)
- [Seven Principles for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning](#)
- [How to Use Culturally Responsive Practice](#)
- [Three Tips to Make any Lesson more Culturally Responsive](#)



Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to curriculum that minimizes barriers and maximizes learning for all students. UDL principles include providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. UDL is a key component of inclusive programs. With UDL, we plan for all children to participate as independently as possible.





Resources

- [Characteristics of Entering Kindergarteners](#)
- [UDL: Principles and Practice](#)
- [UDL Early Childhood Education Crosswalk](#)
- [How to Implement MTSS and UDL for Equitable Student Success](#)
- [Kindergarten video examples of the three principles of UDL:](#)
 - [UDL: Multiple Means of Engagement in Kindergarten](#)
 - [UDL: Multiple Means of Representation in Kindergarten](#)
 - [UDL: Multiple Means of Action & Expression in Kindergarten](#)
- [The Myth of Average \(YouTube\) video about nurturing individual potential](#)



Multilingual Education Program

Strategies for supporting Multilingual Learners (MLLs) include creating a welcoming environment, using culturally relevant materials, and promoting peer interaction. There are benefits for all students when employing strategies to include and support MLL students.

During the 2023–24 school year in Washington State, 33.8% of kindergarteners were considered MLLs (OSPI Washington State Report Card). Since one-third of the kindergarten population comprises MLLs, our instruction must ensure that all instruction is accessible and that we explicitly support English language development. Ensure staff have the tools and understanding necessary to fully implement the WIDA ELD Standards Framework.



Resources

- [OSPI Dual Language Education and Resources](#)
- [6 Essential Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners](#)
- [WIDA Can Do Philosophy](#)
- [PLUSS Framework for Instructional / Intervention Enhancement: Observation Rubric](#)
- [PreK–3 WIDA Landing Page](#)
- [WIDA PreK–3 Essential Actions](#)



CHAPTER

6

INTENTIONAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



Family serves as a child's first, longest lasting, and most important teacher. When families are meaningfully and continuously engaged in their child's learning and development, it has a positive impact on the child's academic, health, and well-being outcomes



What is Family Engagement

Family engagement extends beyond inviting or involving families in the educational setting. Parent and Family Engagement (PFE) includes involving families in activities and programs that support children's development, learning, and well-being. This includes their participation in planning, developing, and evaluating these activities, programs, and systems. For families to feel welcome and respected, the school environment must reflect its population.



Building Relationships

Building a strong partnership with families in early childhood education is rooted in trust, respect, and collaboration. This involves open communication, valuing family input, and fostering inclusivity. It is essential to ensure parents with children with disabilities and parents of children who are multilingual feel included and welcome in the classroom and child's education.





Resources

- [Parent and Family Engagement Guides and Resources](#)
- [Principles of Effective Family Engagement](#)
- [6 Strategies for Partnering with Families of English Language Learners](#)
- [English language learners in special education: 4 things to know about partnering with families](#)
- [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#)
- [Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement from Head Start \(USDHHS, 2018\)](#)



Conferences

It is essential there is enough release time allotted to teachers (if necessary, schedule substitutes) to conduct meaningful, 30–45 minute family conferences (not including transition time) to ensure there is enough time for meaningful dialogue.



Communication

Communicating with families is a top priority. Effective communication with families must go beyond outdated one-way methods where teachers merely inform parents. Instead, using two-way communication treats teachers and families as equal partners, showing respect for the family's knowledge about their child. Find out the different languages spoken in your TK and kindergarten classrooms and secure resources for translation and interpretation services. Establish and share the protocol for teachers to access them.





Learning at Home

The interactions families have at home with their children, as part of family engagement in education, are shown to make the biggest impact on children's academic success. Be mindful of what activities you decide to send home for completion. Emphasize that families do not need special materials or expertise—meaningful learning can happen through conversation, shared tasks, and play.



Resources

- [Multiple Resources for Families](#)
- [Twenty Ways You Can Help Your Child Succeed at School](#)
- [Discussions on School Policies Related to Homework for Young Students](#)
- [Key Lessons from Research on Homework](#)
- [Is Homework Good for Kids?](#)
- [Rethinking reading logs for beginning readers](#)
- [A non-traditional reading log](#)
- [Why I broke up with the reading log and six things to do instead](#)
- [Alternatives to home/school reading logs](#)



CHAPTER

7

ASSESSMENT, OBSERVATION, AND DOCUMENTATION



Assessment in TK and kindergarten classrooms must be centered around high-quality observation and documentation of children’s learning and development. Teachers must be aware of the possible biases they bring to the process of observation and documentation.

TPEP Criteria: Using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning.



WaKIDS

RCW Requirements: Administer the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS; [RCW 28A.300.072](#), TK; [RCW 28A.655.080](#), Kindergarten).

The WaKIDS Whole-child Assessment requires teachers to observe students and capture documentation of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Remember, it is NOT a pull-out assessment.

WaKIDS has three separate, but equally important components: Family Connection, Early Learning Collaboration, and the Whole-child Assessment. The WaKIDS Whole-child Assessment is the first TK–12 Washington State assessment to deliberately focus on the whole child. Many schools and LEAs require other diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to be administered in the early grades, primarily in reading and mathematics along with WaKIDS. As many beginning-of-school-year assessments overlap in content, it is appropriate to use documentation for both the WaKIDS Whole-child Assessment and other assessments. Be mindful about developmental appropriateness (how much time a child can focus, whether or not they feel comfortable, etc.) when assessing our youngest students.





High-Quality Observation and Documentation

To maximize observations, integrate them into daily routines and instruction. Valuable insights can be gathered during non-instructional times like snack and outdoor play. Authentic assessment focuses on evaluating young children's abilities, behaviors, skills, and knowledge in real-life contexts that are meaningful and relevant to their everyday experiences.

Bias can be evident in documentation of observations and especially during the interpretation of the data. It is critical that practitioners make sure implicit bias is not influencing how assessments are interpreted. Efficient documentation storage is crucial. Explore different methods to find what works best for you but ensure a systematic approach for easy access to assessment data.



Using Data to Inform Instruction

Effectively using data is vital for planning activities and fostering student development. Observation and assessment data highlight students' strengths, needs, and interests, enabling tailored instruction and targeted support. This data also guides adaptations to support students with disabilities and those with challenging behaviors.



Resources

- [OSPI WaKIDS](#)
- [Quick and Easy Notes: Practical Strategies for Busy Teachers](#)
- [Photographs and Learning Progressions: Supports for Intentional Assessment and Instruction in Mathematics](#)
- [The Power of Documentation](#)
- [Assessment in Kindergarten: Meeting Children Where They Are](#)
- [Want to Be Amazing at Kindergarten Documentation?](#)



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